

DHEL implements state wide courier service

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Rapid, reliable transport of laboratory specimens became invaluable during the anthrax incident of October 2002. Kansas Highway Patrol was a crucial partner during that event; however it quickly became apparent that they could not routinely be the method of choice by which the Kansas Department of Health and Environment Laboratories (DHEL) received emergency specimens. The lab undertook an investigation to find rapid, reliable, cost effective emergency transport to meet this need.

A group of our partners, the Kansas Laboratory Response Network, was interviewed and the most frequent request from the hospital and private laboratories was for more rapid turn around time from DHEL. Internally there were a few adjustments DHEL could make, but the most significant time was taken up by the specimen receipt and report distribution phase.

With the assistance of several local health departments, a service was developed that responds to several needs. Although pushed by concerns about Bioterrorism response, this system is an investment in the infrastructure of the public health service that will be capable of responding to natural occurring emerging disease threats such as SARS.

By using the competitive bidding process and funding from Homeland Security, the DHEL and our contractor have built an infrastructure that allows same day or next day delivery of 80 percent of our specimens and the associated test result reports. The previous response time had ranged from a minimum of two days up to seven days in some cases.

This service also accommodates next day delivery of collection kits and shipping supplies, delivery of medications from the TB program and provides 24-hour, seven day a week emergency transport of approved specimens determined by Epidemiology to be from a high-risk situation.

While providing services, a significant cost savings and improvement in service to the local public health agencies has been achieved. The DHEL continues to seek other possibilities for improvement of services and work to enhance the efforts of the state and local public health team.